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PRESS RELEASE

Regional Conference on the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV in Central Asia

ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN, February 25, 2005—In order to address the growing problem of HIV/AIDS transmission throughout Central Asia, the American International Health Alliance (AIHA), with the support of the United States Government, is hosting a regional conference on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT) on March 1-3 at the “Kazakhstan” hotel in Almaty. Funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development, AIHA is being assisted by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), and sessions will be conducted by the World Health Organization’s Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Although the actual number of recorded cases of HIV/AIDS in Central Asia is low in comparison to other countries of the former Soviet Union, such as Russia and Ukraine, the rate of new infections is increasing at an alarming pace. As nations in the region work to stop the epidemic while it is still in its early stages, preventing mother-to-child transmission of the virus has emerged as a key element of their comprehensive strategy to combat HIV/AIDS. Because most of these countries are in the initial stages of PMTCT implementation, the timing of this conference is particularly appropriate.

The conference will provide participants with an overview of PMTCT goals and achievements and the opportunity to learn about successful programs already operating in the region, including AIHA’s highly successful Odessa PMTCT model, which was implemented at four pilot sites in Kazakhstan in 2003. This comprehensive prevention, care, and treatment program has resulted in a 75 percent decrease in mother-to-child transmissions of HIV in the Ukrainian port city of Odessa. “This conference will provide an excellent opportunity for expanding the PMTCT model, which is already being successfully replicated in Kazakhstan, to other countries in the Central Asian Region,” said Dr. N. Nizova, AIHA’s consultant on HIV/AIDS from the Odessa Clinical Hospital. HIV/AIDS specialists working on the project in Odessa—as well as Kazakh clinicians from the PMTCT pilot cities in Kazakhstan—will be on hand to share their experience.

Key government officials, policymakers, public health professionals, and care-providers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—along with leading international HIV/AIDS experts representing the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), WHO, UNICEF, and other scientific and donor organizations—are expected to attend this important event.

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